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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3472  
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 0678  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 3705  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 3968  
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 5376  
RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO 0358  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 6096  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 000719

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/02/2018  
TAGS: [ASEC](#) [BL](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#)  
SUBJECT: EVO,S SPOKESMAN RESIGNS, REVEALING INNER CIRCLE  
CRACKS

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In an abrupt move, Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) party insider Alex Contreras officially resigned as the government's spokesman on April 1. Contreras is a long-time friend and confidant of Bolivian President Evo Morales, and his departure reveals serious fissures and in-fighting in Evo,s inner circle of advisors. Most observers agree that Contreras, resignation signals that the hard-liners, led by the Minister of the Presidency Juan Ramon Quintana, are gaining the upper hand over the indigenous and ideological wings of the MAS party. The opposition was quick to applaud Contreras, exit, likening it to rats fleeing a sinking ship, although some expressed doubt as to whether Evo would actually accept the resignation. End summary.

¶2. (C) A visibly shaken Contreras read out his letter of resignation at a press conference on April 1, his voice cracking and his hands trembling throughout. He cited a range of factors related to what he referred to as his irrevocable decision to resign, stressing that after more than two years in government a fundamental change of direction is needed: unity is needed instead division, dialogue with all sectors instead of violence, freedom of expression instead of censorship, transparency instead of corruption, and management instead of disinformation. Contreras lashed out at & former neo-liberals8 and internal enemies who are now an obstacle in the process of change and who will go their own ways once they fulfill their obscure objectives. The latter comment was a not-so-subtle reference to Quintana, who reportedly has been feuding behind the scenes with Contreras for months now.

¶3. (C) According to some sources, the straw that broke the camel's back was a directive two weeks ago from the Superintendent of Telecommunications (SITTEL) to thousands of Bolivian radio and TV stations instructing them to refrain from broadcasting information that "even if authentic, could harm or alarm the population on account of the way or time it

is broadcast." Apparently the idea was Quintana,s, who tried unsuccessfully to make Contreras send the directive out from his office. Contreras, a former journalist, publicly criticized the directive once it was released, going so far as to say that the government would defend freedom of press to the end. Contreras, actions in these incidents allegedly led to a direct rebuke from Evo. When Contreras apparently requested that Evo dismiss Quintana for straying from the party's intended course, Evo declined, and Contreras may have decided to resign himself as a result at that point.

¶4. (C) President Morales publicly derided Contreras and his resignation, commenting that the accusations in the letter were false, but joking that &Alex Contreras has a lot of fun. When he's tired of having so much fun he will return to the Palace. However, other MAS leaders were not so dismissive of the turn of events, admitting that the government has a serious crisis on its hands.

¶5. (C) Comment: Contreras, departure confirms that the behind-the-scenes infighting in Evo,s administration is intensifying. There are generally believed to be three competing camps: the hard-liners headed by Quintana, the ideologues headed by Vice President Garcia Linera, and the indigenous Evo-loyalists led by Foreign Minister Choquehuanca (one of only two indigenous members of Evo,s cabinet). None of these groups want much to do with the United States, but Garcia Linera and Choquehuanca at least recognize that they can pursue their agenda without having to break with us. There are growing signs of dissatisfaction among Evo,s base of MAS supporters, and Contreras appealed directly to them to "closely guard the process of change, and to recover an active, protagonist role from the neoliberal and encrusted enemies who are now obstructing the process of change. There are even reports that some of Evo,s closest remaining advisors are seeing the writing on the wall. In a meeting with EmbOffs, a contact reported that Foreign Minister Choquehuanca had recently commented that unless Evo changed course, he did not see him lasting out the year. With inflation on the rise, an emboldened opposition about to hold a vote on autonomy, and mounting protests among workers in the hydrocarbons and transportation sectors, Evo must soon decide whether to compromise to save his administration or continue trying to impose his will and face an increasingly uncertain future. End Comment.  
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